



New Haven Democracy Fund

"To ensure that all the citizens of New Haven have a fair and meaningful opportunity to participate in the election of mayor."
New Haven Code of General Ordinances, Chapter 2, Article XI, §2-821 • Established in 2007 • democracyfund@newhavenct.net



Testimony of Alyson Heimer
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In Support of H.B. No. 6745 AN ACT ESTABLISHING A PILOT PROGRAM FOR MUNICIPAL CAMPAIGN FINANCE FILINGS

I want to thank Chairman Cassano, Chairman Jutila, and members of the Committee, for allowing me the opportunity to testify today. My name is Alyson Heimer; I am the Administrator of the Democracy Fund in New Haven. I am here to testify in support of H.B. 6745. This act creates a pilot program allowing municipalities to opt into the State Elections and Enforcement Commission's (SEEC) electronic-filing system. This will decrease the paperwork burden for Town Clerks, municipal candidates and their teams, and ensure transparency of election finance filings.

It Works In New Haven

New Haven is the only city in Connecticut that presently uses electronic filings for our mayoral race. During the creation of our publicly-financed program for mayoral races (The Democracy Fund), the city got special permission from the SEEC to allow campaign treasurers access eCRIS and file online. This system works for us. It cuts down on the workload Town Clerks have to do during election season (they are also responsible for absentee ballots and filings for 30 aldermanic wards). This system eases the paperwork burden on campaign teams, allows them to save work mid-process and return to it. Papers never get lost or crumpled, handwriting is never an issue, and compliance and audits can be completed more easily. The SEEC can quickly access the files needed if they are investigating complaints. Reporters filter the data to create graphics showing voters how candidates are paying for their races, and who they are spending money on. Electronic filing has helped increase sentiment that our mayoral race is transparent. Having electronic copies reduces the risk of paper filings being destroyed by Town Clerks after five years, a real problem we had before 2009.

The Benefits of Electronic Filing for Campaigns

I have worked as a treasurer on political campaigns that used the Citizen's Election Program (CEP) and required online filings through the SEEC. I know how important it is to have all members of the team on the same page and looking at the same data. Online filings through the eCRIS system enable multiple members to review a filing before it is submitted, helping to **cut down on errors** and eliminate the need for additional filings to correct mistakes.

It also ensures that a candidate's team can accurately report all income and expenditures quickly, correct spellings, and come back to their work to fill in any information that may not be known at the time (like addresses). The eCRIS system gives treasurers the option to bulk upload data directly from an excel spreadsheet, making the process quick and compatible with many fundraising platforms.

Added Transparency

As I mentioned, New Haven presently uses electronic filings for the mayoral race. In my role as Administrator of New Haven's Democracy Fund, having treasurers use the electronic Form 20 online ensures that I can access the data needed to perform the appropriate audit of a candidate's campaign account, needed to verify matching funds and grants. Because it is electronic, I never have to decipher handwriting quirks. Information is accessed right after it is filed, for free, from wherever I am. Not having to go to the Town Clerk to request copies saves time and money for the Fund.

These filings are also visible to any other interested party, be they a member of the public or press. It is important to some voters, like myself, to know who backs a candidate. Personally, I like knowing that members of my community support a person running for office. Having filings available on the SEEC's website makes it possible for anyone to view them at their leisure, and not only during business hours.

This bill provides increase transparency for municipal campaigns, eases the burden on Town Clerks and campaign staff, and provides cleaner ways for candidate committees to file financial data. This program would be opt-in, and not force municipalities that are not ready to transition into any mandated changes. I urge the committee to pass this legislation and enable 20 cities and towns in Connecticut to enjoy the benefits of electronic filing.

I again wish to thank you for your time, and am happy to answer any questions you may have.

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